

## TONBRIDGE AND MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### TONBRIDGE FORUM

Monday, 10th September, 2018

**Present:** Cllr N J Heslop (Chairman), Cllr C P Smith (Vice-Chairman),  
Cllr Mrs J A Anderson, Cllr Mrs P A Bates, Cllr P F Bolt,  
Cllr V M C Branson, Cllr M R Rhodes and Cllr Miss G E Thomas.

Together with County Councillor Mr R Long and representatives from:

Society of Friends	Tonbridge Rotary Club
Tonbridge Art Group	Tonbridge Sports Association
Tonbridge Civic Society	Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club
Tonbridge Historical Society	Tonbridge Town Team
Tonbridge Lions Club	University of the Third Age

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O C Baldock, D J Cure, Mrs M F Heslop, F G Tombolis and County Councillor Mr M Payne, Kent Police (Tonbridge), Tonbridge Line Commuters and Tonbridge Music Club.

#### **TF 18/9 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **TF 18/10 UPDATE ON ANY ACTION IDENTIFIED IN THE LAST MINUTES**

The following updates were provided:

##### **TF 18/2 Chairman Announcements**

The Forum was advised of a positive response to the new seating arrangements and these allowed for informed and audible discussion to be undertaken. In addition, the Chairman indicated that consideration would be given to the current format of the 'question time.'

#### **TF 18/11 UPDATE ON LOCAL PLAN**

In his role as Leader of the Borough Council, the Chairman opened the discussion by reminding Members of the key milestones achieved so far in the preparation of the Local Plan.

It was explained that every council in the country had a statutory obligation to identify sufficient land for future house building and this had to be set out in a Local Plan. The number of houses that had to be planned for was decided by an approach set down by central Government and not by the local council. In Tonbridge and Malling the

housing need had been identified as 13,920 homes for the period of the Local Plan up to 2031. This represented a figure of 696 dwellings per year and meant that, over and above sites already completed, under construction and approved, sufficient new land to build an additional 6,800 homes had to be identified.

Following the Call for Sites exercise and evidence-based assessment the draft Local Plan now included 31 sites, refined to achieve an estimated potential yield of 6,834 new dwellings. This had significantly reduced in size to reflect Local Plan evidence and changes arising from consultations.

The Leader reiterated the very severe consequences if the Borough Council failed in its duty to adopt a Local Plan. Without a Plan in place the Borough Council's ability to manage development would be weakened. In addition, the failure to submit a Local Plan within the transitional period set out by the Government in the new draft National Planning Policy Framework (published on 24 July 2018) would result in significant risks associated with having to address a substantially higher housing provision. It would also cause significant further delays, which would place the Borough Council in a more vulnerable position in terms of land supply in responding to planning applications and facing planning appeals.

In summary, the Leader indicated that generally it was accepted that more homes were required for future generations. However, these should be in the right place and supported by adequate infrastructure. This was what the Local Plan sought to do and it was the responsibility of the Borough Council to consider the strategic overview given the difficult task set by Government. It was noted that the Local Plan was unlikely to resolve community infrastructure problems completely, although it was hoped that the situation could be improved by maximising investment from developers, as identified in the Local Plan.

The Head of Planning and the Planning Policy Manager then provided an update on the preparation of the Local Plan. A revised draft document with a refined development strategy, policies and proposals had been considered recently by the Planning and Transportation Advisory Board on 5 June and 24 July and at an Extraordinary Cabinet on 3 September 2018. The latter had recommended to Council that the draft Local Plan be approved for submission to the Secretary of State after a further period of statutory consultation. Further detail set out in these reports was available on the Borough Council's [website](#); together with the completed evidence base including the Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

Reference was made to the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and it was confirmed that the transitional arrangements, previously outlined, remained in place. Consequently the target date for submitting the Local Plan to the Secretary of State was now 24 January

2019, if the Borough Council wished to have the Plan examined against the previous NPPF and in particular to avoid the new standardised approach to housing assessment.

Members were advised that, subject to Council approval, the next step would be further public consultation (Regulation 19) and there would be a detailed information pack and a full set of documents to comment on. It was envisaged that a six week public consultation would start at the beginning of October 2018, or very soon after, and would give local residents and other parties the opportunity to comment on the proposals. These comments/representations would be submitted to the Secretary of State with the Local Plan and would ultimately be considered by an appointed Planning Inspector.

A number of tools would be used during the consultation including the website, social media platforms, YouTube, infographics and an opportunity for face to face discussions via drop in sessions. There would also be hard copies of documents at various locations (Council offices and libraries) to maximise coverage. All forms used as part of the Regulation 19 consultation would be compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations.

Although there was opportunity to comment on the Plan (via the Regulation 19 consultation arrangements) it was unlikely that the Borough Council would make any substantive changes as the document was believed to be 'sound'. However, the Planning Inspector could decide on amendments and it was, therefore, important for organisations and residents to participate in the consultation process. All information related to the Local Plan, including representations received under Regulation 19, would be collated into common themes and submitted to the Secretary of State and made publically available, subject to General Data Protection Regulations compliance.

It was anticipated that an independent Planning Inspector would be appointed to the Borough Council early in 2019 if the draft Local Plan was submitted in December 2018 as planned. Once an Inspector was appointed they would contact the Borough Council to make arrangements for a hearing within Tonbridge and Malling. Public Examinations ordinarily took 4-6 weeks to review all the evidence with a further 3 months before a final decision was made. There was also the possibility of the Inspector asking to hear from those who had made representations, but this was subject to their discretion and subject to the points made.

The Borough Council anticipated adopting the new Local Plan by the end of 2019, subject to the Inspector's comments and any suggested amendments.

The following comments and points were raised, discussed and noted:

- It was important that any representations submitted in advance of the formal consultation were resubmitted as part of the Regulation 19 consultation to avoid confusion and to ensure they were forwarded to the Secretary of State/Planning Inspector for consideration.
- It was confirmed that any resident or organisation could comment on any site whether or not they were included in the draft Local Plan and the Chairman strongly encouraged participation in the consultation. Technical advice could be provided by Planning Services.
- The Head of Planning indicated that residents would be advised that there was opportunity to object (or support) sites not in the draft Local Plan during promotion of the Regulation 19 consultation.
- Members recognised the significant risk to the Borough Council of missing the transitional period submission deadline of December 2018 and noted the significant penalty that could be imposed in terms of increased numbers of housing.
- It was emphasised that if Council did not approve the draft Local Plan the process would need to be substantially restarted and be subject to the revised NPPF which would lead to significant delay and an increase in housing figures to address.
- The status of existing policies such as the Central Area Action Plan and Climate Change Policy were queried. In response, it was clarified that these policies would no longer apply as other measures to address these concerns would be set out in the Local Plan. It was hoped that this would provide greater flexibility and would run alongside the NPPF and the Planning Policy Guidance.
- The introduction of new GDPR legislation in May 2018 had represented a significant challenge regarding the publication and sharing of personal information. This had impacted upon the Borough Council's ability to publish representations received via the Regulation 18 consultation, which had been collected prior to a disclaimer and privacy notice being available. Action had been taken to resolve this for the Regulation 19 consultation and all information would include a disclaimer which would make it easier to publish.

Finally, the Forum was reminded that the Local Plan was a strategic document and would be a valuable tool in supporting and guiding development management throughout the Borough.

**TF 18/12 UPDATE ON WASTE SERVICES CONTRACT**

The Head of Street Scene and Leisure and the Waste Contract Officer provided an update on the procurement process for the new Waste Services Contract. Members were reminded that the current refuse and recycling collections and street cleansing contract ended in February 2019 and was being retendered on a partnership basis with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and in liaison with Kent County Council.

Following consideration by the Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board and the Extraordinary Cabinet on 4 September 2018 the new South West Kent Waste Partnership contract was due to be awarded. Although this would commence on 1 March 2019 the existing service would continue while arrangements were made to launch the new service. The name of the successful contractor would be announced on 25 September 2018.

The new contract enabled a much improved service to be delivered to residents and included:

- Weekly food waste collection;
- Fortnightly collection of residual waste;
- Alternative fortnightly collection of plastics, cartons, cans and glass (mixed dry recyclate) in a wheeled bin with a separate container for paper and card;
- A separate fortnightly collection of garden waste (as an 'opt in' charged service); and
- Additional collection of textiles, small electrical items (WEEE) and household batteries

It was reported that the proposals maintained the current frequency of high speed roads cleansing, which was the highest in Kent, retained the Saturday bulky waste collection service and would contribute to the Borough Council's Savings and Transformation Strategy.

Particular reference was made to the proposed introduction of 'opt-in' charges for the collection of garden waste. Members were advised that the Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board and the Cabinet had recommended to Council a standard charge of £40 per year, with further detail related to any introductory offers to be considered by the Advisory Board at a future date. It was explained that these 'opt-in' charges would support the enhanced recycling service, particularly the introduction of kerbside collection for plastics and glass. The Forum was reminded that all the Borough Council's fees and charges were reviewed on an annual basis and this would also apply to the 'opt-in' for garden waste collection.

Residents would be fully informed of all details and an independent PR consultant had been engaged to develop a Marketing and Communication Strategy. The Borough Council recognised that

effective communication and messaging was vital in promoting the new service.

Members welcomed the proposals, which delivered a much improved service, and encouraged increased recycling of plastics and glass. There was also the potential to include additional services such as the collection of small electrical items, textiles and batteries. However, it was noted that a significant amount of work remained to ensure the smooth introduction of the new service.

The Forum participated in significant discussion on a number of issues including the use of bags for properties where bins were not possible; availability of additional bins and associated charging; cross contamination of bins due to their change of use; recycling rates within Tonbridge and Malling; the benefits of home composting and concerns around the seasonal nature of garden waste. In addition, the future of 'bring sites' and collection of light bulbs was raised.

In response Members were advised that all options regarding the contract, service options and collection methods, including the future of 'bring sites' were subject to further review and discussion with the preferred contractor, the Street Scene and Environment Services Advisory Board and the Cabinet. However, in regard to the 'bring sites' it had been agreed that these would be reduced to ten key locations across the Borough following the introduction of the new kerbside collections. These sites would be reviewed following a further 12 months to assess demand and need.

The Forum was also advised that a pragmatic approach had been taken to use existing resources and containers. Officers were confident that the risk of cross contamination due to change of use was minimal. However, there was the option to offer cleaning of bins where appropriate but this was subject to further consideration.

It was also unlikely that light bulbs would be collected for recycling unless an efficient and cost effective solution could be identified. Shops were required to help customers recycle old bulbs for free by offering an in-store 'take back scheme' or paying towards a recycling service and retailers should be encouraged to honour this requirement.

In conclusion, the new Waste Services Contract aimed to offer a fairer service accessible to all.

### **TF 18/13 KENT POLICE UPDATE**

Kent Police were unable to attend this meeting due to operational pressures and their apologies were noted.

However, the Chairman referred to the Community Alcohol Partnership which had been launched in Tonbridge on 13 July 2018. The scheme

aimed to prevent underage drinking with a mix of education, enforcement, community engagement and the provision of diversionary activities for young people. It was hoped that this would be as successful as the initiative operating in Snodland.

#### **TF 18/14 KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SERVICES UPDATE**

Members noted the report of the Kent County Council Community Liaison Officer (Anne Charman) which provided details on a number of County initiatives and consultations. Further information was available on the Kent County Council Services Update report attached to the agenda.

The Kent County Councillor for Tonbridge (Richard Long) provided a brief update on the progress of the High Street and Station improvement works and advised of new proposals related to the location and design of the lay-bys.

There would also be improvements to the pedestrian access outside the station and consideration was being given to the reconfiguration of nearby roads.

Further detail related to these would be presented in due course.

Reference was made to a temporary pedestrian crossing in Tonbridge which Members of the Forum considered dangerous. County officers were aware of the concerns raised and County Councillor Long offered to clarify the position with Kent Highway Services.

#### **TF 18/15 TONBRIDGE AND MALLING SERVICES UPDATE**

The Chairman (in his role as Leader of the Borough) provided an update on key points relevant to Tonbridge. The headline messages set out in the presentation would be available online and circulated with the Minutes. However, in summary these included:

- Help for homeless households: The Borough Council had taken positive action to increase affordable temporary accommodation in the borough with the purchase of a property on Tonbridge High Street.
- Business Rates Retention Scheme: Kent authorities had successfully bid for involvement in the Business Rates Retention Pilot. As a result part of the funding secured would go towards promoting economic growth. Proposed initiatives relevant to Tonbridge included grants for independent businesses under a Commercial Frontages Improvement Scheme; support for pop-up shops, Wi-Fi and events.

- Fairtrade Tonbridge: The Borough Council were awaiting a decision from the Fairtrade Foundation regarding the application for Fairtrade Town status. Any organisation wishing to get involved was asked to contact the Borough Council's Economic Regeneration Officer (Jeremy Whittaker).
- A number of recent events had been well attended and these included the Luna Cinema, Illyria performances, marking the Centenary of the end of World War I, the medieval Fayre and Dragon Boat Races. The Chairman thanked all the organisations involved for their contribution in making the events so successful.
- Leisure improvements and investment such as the newly resurfaced Tonbridge to Penshurst Cycle Path and new footpaths and children's play area at Haysden Country Park. The Borough Council continued to explore funding streams for further investment.

The University of the Third Age referred to the recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee review into the support and provision of events and sought clarity on proposals to introduce charging to use the Castle Lawn and Sportsground. In response, the Head of Street Scene and Leisure confirmed that a review was ongoing and no decision had been reached at the present time. It was indicated that a sensible and cautious approach to charging for community and charity events would be taken. However, it was realistic for the Borough Council to consider charging for commercial and corporate events to cover administration fees and utilities costs.

## **TF 18/16 ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM ORGANISATIONS**

### **Christmas Festival 2018:**

The Tonbridge Rotary Club announced that the Tonbridge Christmas Festival would take place on 25 November 2018. The High Street would be closed for a number of festive events and the evening would finish with a firework display.

### **Promotion of Tonbridge:**

The Tonbridge Town Team advised that a range of merchandise promoting Tonbridge was available to buy. This included tee shirts with the slogan 'I am a Tonbridge Dragon', reusable coffee cups and reusable water bottles. Prices ranged from £6 to £4. Anyone interested should contact Mr Howard Porter.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm